

Stephen Littlechild

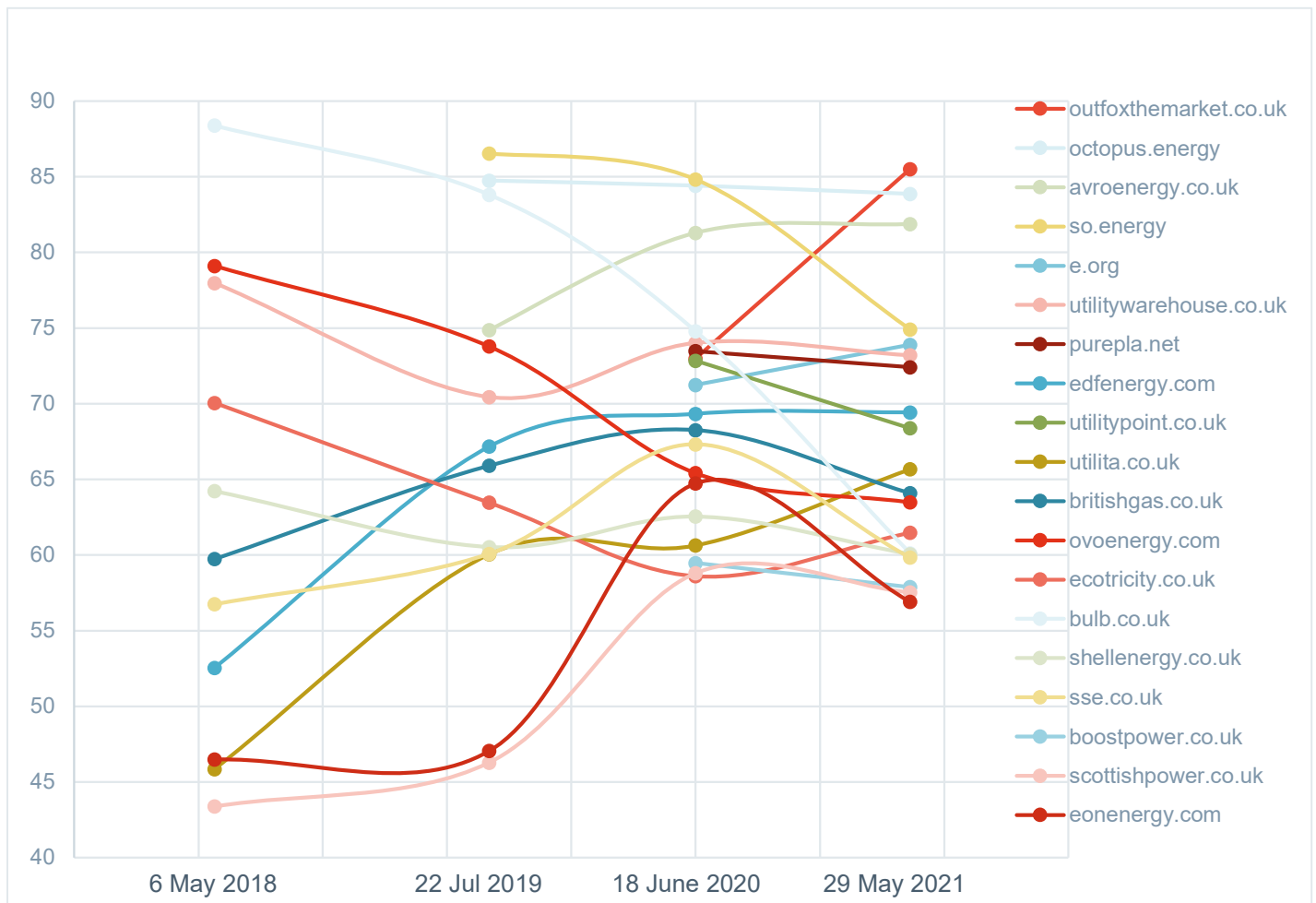
Professor Stephen Littlechild, former Director General of Electricity Supply and Associate at the Energy Policy Research Group at the University of Cambridge, writes about his Overall Customer Satisfaction League, a new way to evaluate suppliers' customer service. He considers how suppliers' ratings have changed over the past few months, and since 2018.

The latest Overall Customer Satisfaction (OCS) scores are now available, following Ofgem's publication of the 2021 Q1 complaints figures.

The OCS score is calculated as the average of four different ratings of energy suppliers:

- A customer complaints rating based on the complaints reported each quarter by Ofgem, giving a 50% weighting to the number of complaints per 100,000 customers and 25% weightings to the proportions of complaints resolved within 24 hours and three months.
- The annual rating by the Consumers' Association Which? magazine.
- The quarterly rating by Citizens Advice.
- The TrustScore assigned by customers recording their views in real time on the consumer site Trustpilot.

Figure 1: Overall Customer Satisfaction Scores 2018 - 2021



Source: Professor Stephen Littlechild

The OCS score does not measure one single aspect of performance. It is intended to be an indication of an energy supplier's ability to provide customer satisfaction across a wide range of metrics, and to be a good supplier according to various different criteria.

In the January update of the OCS scores ([ES745](#)), covering the period from August 2020 to January 2021, Octopus Energy and So Energy held their positions at the top of Division 1, with Co-operative Energy continuing its rise up the rankings. PurePlanet had slipped a little but remained top of Division 2, along with Utility Warehouse and E. In Division 3, British Gas and SSE both increased their scores considerably over the year to August 2020. However, in the subsequent period, both fell back on Ofgem complaints and Citizens Advice ratings.

The last five months

Ofgem's latest (2021 Q1) complaints data shows a slightly lower performance overall. Small improvements by Outfox, Shell and especially E were outweighed by more significant worsening by OVO, So, SSE and especially Bulb. There were only very small, if any, changes in TrustScores.

It is of interest to look more broadly at where the latest OCS scores take suppliers, in the context of the whole of the three-year period since OCS calculations began. The diagram would be too complicated if it included all suppliers ever measured. So, Figure 1 shows the evolving positions of those 18 suppliers that appear in the OCS league today.

What are the main movements to date?

First, significant improvements by the five legacy suppliers around mid-2019 to mid-2020. Sadly, four of them have since fallen back slightly, except for EDF, who improved the soonest and most, and has maintained its performance, to put it now in the top half of the league.

Second, significant declines by former leading performers. In May 2018, Bulb had the highest score ever, but since then it has fallen to fourth from bottom of the league. OVO too has fallen, from second of these suppliers in May 2018 to halfway.

Third, and more recently, remarkable improvements since May 2020 by Outfox the Market, from just over mid-point to top, and by Ecotricity and E. And another push upwards by Utilita, now in the top half after second from bottom in 2018.

Fourth, more recent declines by So Energy, top last year, and by Utility Point.

Fifth, but by no means least, non-mover Octopus maintains its remarkably consistent position at or near the top of the league.

Recall that, simply to be in the OCS league at all is an indication that a supplier has attracted and/or retained enough customers to warrant rating by Which? and Citizens Advice. The newer and smaller suppliers may often offer lower prices, but in terms of customer experience they are largely unknown quantities. In contrast, customers considering whether to switch to or from a supplier in the OCS league can see at a glance what others think – and have thought – of that supplier.

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